

# Module C: Representation and Text

## Elective: History and Memory

### Suggested Approach

*'Come and see...  
The key is the forgotten heart, the murdered prayer, the death  
of memory.  
It opens the blessing or curse.  
Come and see.'*

How the interplay of history and memory of an event and/or situation are represented through the form, medium of production and language features. The representation reflects the experiences, purpose and perspective of a composer. History provides the documented evidence but memory adds the human dimension inviting empathy and understanding.



**Paragraph 1:** Thesis linked directly to the question and related to how the interplay or reciprocal relationship of history and memory when considered in relation to the event of the Holocaust and/or a situation, such as being a child enduring the nightmarish Holocaust or a child's loss of innocence in war, invites deeper empathy and understanding. Then refer to how the representation of this interplay is shaped by the composer's perspective, experiences and purpose.

**Paragraph 2:** Topic sentence related to thesis, such as how a composer's perspective, purpose and experiences shaped the representation of the history and memories of an event and/or situation. Refer to Baker's perspective as an Historian and a Jew whose parents have survived the horrors of the Holocaust. Provide a quote/s that reflects his purpose and a brief overview. Refer to the choice of the form of a memoir and its medium of production: the Midrash and a bricolage, etc.

**Paragraph 3:** Link related text to discussion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Gate. Then follow the same pattern as above.

**Paragraph 4-5:** Topic sentence referring to how language is used to evocatively convey the history and memories of the event and/or situation. Refer to why we need the interplay of history and memory. Refer to Genia and Yossel's experiences. Quotes and language features and the meaning conveyed analysed.

**Paragraph 6-7:** Make a comparison or contrast between the related text and 50<sup>th</sup> Gate referring to how language is used to evocatively convey the history and memories of the event and/or situation.

**Paragraph 8:** Topic sentence related to how conveying the history and memories of the event and/or situation lead to deeper understanding of life and humanity. Baker has developed an appreciation of the role that memory plays, and learned to respect the courage of his parents and all individuals who have suffered terrible tragedy. Quotes and language features analysed.

**Paragraph 9:** Make a comparison or contrast between the related text and 50<sup>th</sup> Gate. Discuss the understanding that has been gained. Quotes and language features analysed.

**Paragraph 10:** Conclusion referring to how history validates and situates memories, enabling the responder to gain a deeper understanding of .....

### Possible source of quotes

- P. 107 – *'I just can't disconnect my past, you know, I can't forget those moments for as long as I live.'*

- Genia: P. 185 -194, p.214, p.243-250 - *"[I]t was not the facts that were held under suspicion, but her credibility as a survivor. Unlike my father, she could never show her children the scars on her arm; hers were invisible, numbered in the days and years of her stolen childhood."*

*"It was this uncontrollable urge, this repeated questioning of her, this interrogation, as if I was David Irving and not her son pointing the video camera at her."*

*"Dark, hiding in the cupboard it was all dark, while outside we could hear the footsteps, the shots, the screams."*

- Yossi: p.224 - *"My father is on pages forty-two and 109 of a Register of Jewish Survivors published by the Jewish Agency of Palestine in 1945..."*

*"For my father, the rivers have not thawed, until now, when the words break out from their glacial silence, releasing a torrent whose flow runs backward into his darkest nights."*

- P.314 - *'We came from crematoria flames...from bunkers and from the woods...So always remember it, and your children will remember it. They will survive, they will sing and dance.'*

## Examples of Introductions

1. *When memory is represented through texts it is centred on individual human experiences and gives history a human face. Thus, through this representation, memory invites empathy, understanding, and fosters the ability to form an emotional and purposeful connection with the past for the responder. The interplay of history and memory is seen as having value for historians and individuals – particularly for the offspring of people who have undergone severe emotional trauma – in providing insight into elements of the human experience. Mark Baker's bricolage styled literary memoir, *The Fiftieth Gate: A Journey Through Memory*, and Nam Le's poignant short story, 'Love and Honour and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice', both explore how a son comes to terms with his own identity and sense of self following the traumatic experiences of his parents.*
2. *Within the frame of history and memory there exists a tension: whilst objective truths may undermine the veracity of subjective memories, emotionally-charged personal accounts generate an intimate understanding that sterilised historical fact is incapable of achieving. Thus, the representation of an event as a product of both archival evidence and personal memory provides the most intimately accurate understanding of the historical 'real'. Mark Raphael Baker's *The Fiftieth Gate* develops this understanding: to undertake the most cohesive investigation, Baker reconciles the stories of his parents – two Jewish Holocaust survivors – with archived, historical documentation of the Holocaust. The ABC's Holocaust survivor interview 'Elders with Andrew Denton: Helen Bamber' provides a similar understanding through its synthesised representation of the Holocaust as a product of Bamber's own memories and historical photographs and footage. In close comparison, in her poem, 'The Archivist', Lois E. Olen creatively blends historical terms with the emotion of survivors' memories in her representation of the Holocaust so as to enable a deeper, more personal understanding.*
3. *The interplay between History and Memory affects the notion that only through a combination of personal stories (memory) and public stories (history) can the realities of the past form. Memory provides the testimonies that History fails to offer, and this provides emotion and empathy in the individual, creating a better understanding of the human experience. Mark Baker's series of memoirs "the 50<sup>th</sup> Gate", Roman Polanski's documentary "The Pianist – the story of survival" and Tawnysha Lynch's poem "As The Orchestra Played" powerfully conveys the idea that memory provides the testimonies which history fails to offer.*

*This leads to a deeper understanding of past events and empathy for those whose lives are represented.*

*An individual's representation of a tragic event such as the Holocaust is influenced by their perspective and their purpose. Baker's memoir reflects his work as an historian and the fact that he is the son of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. His purpose is to provide a record that celebrates the courage and survival of his parents and other Jewish people. At the beginning of memoir, Baker is unable to recognise the importance of memory. Instead he privileges History and relates credibility to subsequent historical records and documents. The juxtaposition of Yossel and Genia's story achieves this. Yossel survived Auschwitz and other concentration camps. Baker adheres and validates this as historical documentation and testimonies echo the memories of his father. Genia, on the other hand, represents Baker's inability to record memory as truth, due to his privileging of history and facts. "For her, there are no survivors to interview." The repetition of high modality outlines his strong feelings towards history and memory. The repetition of "I don't understand throughout the novel when associating with Genia's story, emphasises his privileging of history. According to him there is "no means of validating her story" and thus it cannot be validated and recorded as truth.*

*However, in gate 42, we see Baker begin to realise the importance of memory in illuminating the realities of the past. Gate 42 is an imaginative recreation of Baker's grandmother Hinda as she heads towards the gas chambers and extermination. The use of evocative, emotive olfactory imagery achieved through abstract nouns in "The air contained the pungent blend of fresh vomit and faeces" signals the horror and despair that his grandmother experienced. It allows the audience to feel and interact empathetically with the story. This is ultimately represented in her final memories which were the paradox of "deafening screams and the incongruous image of a "young boy being thrown from a door above." The violent and evocative imagery through the verb "thrown" suggests the emotive nature of memory. Gate 42 privileges the importance of memory as it generates far more emotion and validation than history ever could. Thus, the memoirs, through an interplay of history and memory, convey that memory is necessary in order to powerfully convey the human experience due to its provision of emotion.*

## **Suggested Texts of Own Choosing**

*All That I Am - Anna Funda*

*The Streetsweeper - Elliot Perlman*

*The Hare with Amber Eyes - Edmund de Waal*

*Speak Memory – Nabokov*

*Here is where we meet, John Berger*

*The Killing Fields*

*'Guernica' – Picasso*

*'The Visage of War' and 'Soft Construction with Boiled Beans' - Salvador Dali*

*The Incredible Lightness of Being - Kundera*

*'The Persistence of Memory' and 'The Disintegration of Memory' – Salvador Dali*

*From A to X – John Berger*

*They Call me Mr Pip- Lloyd Jones*

*'In Memory of Marie A' – Brecht*

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Through excluding the essential role of memory in the representation of the past, we are reminded of how both history and memory must coexist in order to articulate human attitudes and behaviour. Mark Baker's *Fiftieth Gate* and Elie Weisel's 1991 speech 'The Perils of Indifference' show how human attitudes and behaviours ~~is~~ of the past must be represented to the present and future in order to cater a ~~an~~ valid interpretation. They both show how the sturdiness of documentation, and the fragmentation of memory, are interdependent for representation - the exclusion of one can restrict the ~~the~~ transition of reality and prevent the evocation of core values.

The strengths and flaws of both history and memory are highlighted to show the dynamic interplay which is at work. Baker is able to ~~the~~ portray conflicting interests and purposes of objective history, embodied in the composer as an historian, and subjective memory, replicated in Genia as a survivor of the Holocaust. This interplay is stipulated by his rhetorical question "Does history remember more than memory?", but is furthered when he critiques memory - "It was not the facts which were under suspicion, but her credibility as a survivor". The academic tone here is resonant of Baker's purpose, and his "desire to interrogate". This is juxtaposed to Genia's retaliatory tone "You need you need."



Bolks book everywhere. But do you know how it feels?" The repetition and rhetorical question articulate how history may not capture the trauma of personal recollection - an attitude and behaviour which is used against traditional history, which, metaphorically speaking, "can't hear the screams". This dynamic interplay and conflict, ~~emphas~~ which is also shown by Gura's repetition and exclamations in "You will never understand, you will never understand!", shows how ~~an~~ attitudes and behaviours may only be represented to the future by personal recollection, rather than by the objectivity of historical past events.

To Elie Weisel's speech, theissentiality of personal recollection for the portrayal of real human attitudes and behaviour, is underlined by showing the consequences of its absence. This is stipulated by his ~~histori~~ accumulation of rhetorical questions in an inquisitorial tone: "What will the ~~our~~ legacy of this vanishing century be?" and "How will it be remembered in the new millennium?". Similarly, he personifies "indifference" and historical documentation to question whether "it is insensitive to our tragedy..." and whether "it doesn't capture to plight of victims". In this sense, Weisel is questioning whether entrusting representation purely in history will reduce the awareness of future generations ~~for~~ and their interpretations - the unreliability of

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history and that it may not capture the reality of trauma and behaviour/attitudes. Similarly, using an axiom, he questions whether this will permit an evocation of core values, namely empathy "for those who have suffered" - "To be indifferent is what makes the human, inhuman". By showing this, Weisel is shown emphasising the independence of recollection and documentation for valid interpretations by the future and present, perspectives looking both on the past with a lens coloured by the strengths and flaws of history and memory.

However, Bahar goes on to articulate the interdependence of history and memory by showing their inevitable confluence to represent past events, situations and personalities. Although he continues to examine the conflicting purposes of both concepts, as shown in the by Gertrude Brenna's rhetorical question and a frustrated tone in "Because I don't have numbers means I can't be trusted?" Similarly though, Bahar questions the reliability of memory by creating the memoir in a bricolage and non linear structure, symbolic of fragmented memory which the reader inevitably finds difficult to interpret. This fragmentation of personal recollection is also shown by the stream of

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consciousness in Yersel's remark "How can anyone remember? How can I? How. Alone in the Dark". This also captures the trauma of memories of personal experiences, as their perspective is one from the present looking back on past experiences, amplifying their reality. However, Bakun insinuates the inevitable collocation of both concepts, which is essential for the representation of human attitudes and behaviour, ~~the~~ that may be lost in the sterility of history. This is shown by the abstract imagery and delineation in chapter 50: "... It always begins in blackness, until the first light illuminates a hazy fragment of memory..." The elipsis here reinforces the ~~the~~ fluidity and ambiguity of this process, as well as showing how "light", a symbol for history, sparks memory (Bakun walking his parents around Europe, so their memory is jogged). By doing this, ~~and~~ Bakun is imparting the ~~a~~ mutual essentiality of history and memory for the representation of complex attitudes and human behaviour.

~~So~~ Weisel continues to stipulate the importance of personal recollection by examining what its absence means for the representation of the past for the future. This is emphasised by the direct address and collective 1st person pronouns in "Do not feel their pain, their agony". This rhetorical question shows how impartial history



may erase the transition of traumatic experience from past records due to its perceived unreliability. This is also shown by the quotation "what about the children... we see them in newspapers... we see them on television, however their fate will always remain the same". Here, not only is history being critiqued for not articulating human attitudes and behaviours, namely those of the past, ~~for~~ it also shows how medium of production may impact interpretation - a future perspective's has carved by differing mediums. This is similarly shown in The Fifth Cake with the bricolage textual form and the tabulation of statistical jargon, ~~on~~ showing how interpretations may not only be questioned because of whether history and or memory has excluded one another, but also by other forces as well as language choice. However, the ambivalence of this interplay and confluence is finally stipulated by his anecdote "I remember <sup>the</sup> myself as a young Jewish boy... walking towards the new century with profound fear and extraordinary hope", in which the paradox emphasises the fluidity and uncertainty.

Both Baker and Weiser are able to articulate the strengths and flaws of history and memory, and how their collocation impacts representations and texts. What is more, both texts explore



how if past events and personal recollection are not ~~mutually~~ treated and utilised similarly, then the portrayal of complex attitudes and behaviour may be invalid, leading to faulty interpretations by the perspectives of present and future generations. Interestingly though, both texts depict how attitudes towards both history and memory may differ, due to one's ~~object~~ belief in the objective or subjective. In this sense, representing both history and memory in past records will give readers a heightened understanding and enrichment as to the representation and interpretation of past experiences, attitudes, and behaviours, and how their complexity - memory is essential for conveying these concepts, rather than just documentation as has been evidenced in the texts.

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